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# SANTINIKETAN

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VISVA - BHARATI



given me knowledge of the wrong from which the children of men suffer.

The cause of it is this, that man's intention is going against God's intention as to how children should grow into knowledge.

We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fulness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. He was born in the human world, but is banished into the world of living gramophones, to expiate for the original sin of being born in ignorance. Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment.

We all know children are lovers of the dust; their whole body and mind thirst for sunlight and air as flowers do. They are never in a mood to refuse the constant invitations to establish direct communication which come to their senses from the universe.

I well remember the surprise and annoyance of an experienced headmaster, reputed to be a successful disciplinarian, when he saw one of the boys of my school climbing a tree and choosing a fork of the branches for settling down to his studies. I had to say to him in explanation that "childhood is the only period of life when a civilized man can exercise his choice between the branches of a tree and his drawing-room chair, and should I deprive this boy of that privilege because I, as a grown up



man, am barred from it?" What is surprising is to notice the same headmaster's approbation of the boys' studying botany. He believes in an impersonal knowledge of the tree because that is science, but not in a personal experience of it. This growth of experience leads to forming instinct, which is the result of nature's own method of instruction. The boys of my school have acquired instinctive knowledge of the physiognomy of the tree. By the least touch they know where they can find a foothold upon an apparently inhospitable trunk; they know how far they can take liberty with the branches, how to distribute their bodies' weight so as to make themselves least burdensome to branchlets. My boys are able to make the best possible use of the tree in the matter of gathering fruits, taking rest and hiding from undesirable pursuers. I myself was brought up in a cultured home in a town, and as far as my personal behaviour goes I have been obliged to act all through my life as if I were born in a world where there are no trees. Therefore I consider it as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact, not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air, but as living trees.

There are men who think that by the simplicity of living, introduced in my school, I preach the idealization of poverty which prevailed in the mediæval age. Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, for living richly is living mostly by proxy, and thus living in a world of lesser reality. This may be good for one's pleasure and pride, but not for one's education. Wealth is a golden cage in which the children of the rich are bred into artificial deadening of their powers. Therefore in my school, much to the disgust of the people of expensive habits, I had to provide for this great teacher—this bareness of furniture and materials—not because it is poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world.

The object of education is to give man the unity of truth. Formerly when life was simple all the different elements of man were in complete



centre from which it received its life and light. And here boys grew up in an intimate vision of eternal life before they were thought fit to enter the state of the householder.

Thus in the ancient India the school was there where was the life itself. There the students were brought up, not in the academic atmosphere of scholarship and learning, or in the maimed life of monastic seclusion, but in the atmosphere of living aspiration. They took the cattle to pasture, collected firewood, gathered fruit, cultivated kindness to all creatures, and grew in their spirit with their own teachers' spiritual growth. This was possible because the primary object of these places was not teaching but giving shelter to those who lived their life in God.

This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind. The narrowness of our caged-up future and the sordidness of our maimed opportunities urged me all the more towards its realization. Those who in other countries are favoured with unlimited expectations of worldly prospects can fix their purposes of education on those objects. The range of their life is varied and wide enough to give them the freedom necessary for development of their powers. But for us to maintain the self-respect which we owe to ourselves and to our creator, we must make the purpose of our education nothing short of the highest purpose of man, the fullest growth and freedom of soul. It is pitiful to have to scramble for small pittances of fortune. Only let us have access to the life that goes beyond death and rises above all circumstances, let us find our God, let us live for that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of things but of inner light, not of power but of love. Such emancipation of soul we have witnessed in our country among men devoid of book-learning and living in absolute poverty. In India we have the inheritance of this treasure of spiritual wisdom. Let the object of our education be to open it out before us and to give us the power to make the true use of it in our life, and offer it to the rest of the world when the time comes, as our contribution to its eternal welfare.



Fortunately for me I had a place ready to my hand where I could begin my work. My father, in one of his numerous travels, had selected this lonely spot as the one suitable for his life of communion with God. This place, with a permanent endowment, he dedicated to the use of those who seek peace and seclusion for their meditation and prayer. I had about ten boys with me when I came here and started my new life with no previous experience whatever.

All round our *asram* is a vast open country, bare up to the line of the horizon except for sparsely-growing stunted date-palms and prickly shrubs struggling with ant-hills. Below the level of the field there extend numberless mounds and tiny hillocks of red gravel and pebbles of all shapes and colours, intersected by narrow channels of rain-water. Not far away towards the south near the village can be seen through the intervals of a row of palm trees the gleaming surface of steel-blue water, collected in a hollow of the ground. A road used by the village people for their marketing in the town goes meandering through the lonely fields, with its red dust staring in the sun. Travellers coming up this road can see from a distance on the summit of the undulating ground the spire of a temple and the top of a building, indicating the Santi-niketan *asram*, among its *amalaki* groves and its avenue of stately *sal* trees.

And here the school has been growing up for over fifteen years, passing through many changes and often grave crisis. Having the evil reputation of a poet, I could with great difficulty win the trust of my countrymen and avoid the suspicion of the bureaucracy. That at last I have been able to accomplish it in some measure is owing to my never expecting it, going on in my own way without waiting for outside sympathy, help or advice. My resources were extremely small, with the burden of a heavy debt upon them. But this poverty itself gave me the full strength of freedom, making me rely upon truth rather than upon materials.

Because the growth of this school was the growth of my life and not that of a mere carrying out of my doctrines, its ideals changed with its



maturity like a ripening fruit that not only grows in its bulk and deepens in its colour, but undergoes change in the very quality of its inner pulp. I started with the idea that I had a benevolent object to perform. I worked hard, but the only satisfaction I had came from keeping count of the amount of sacrifice in money, energy and time, admiring my own untiring goodness. But the result achieved was of small worth. I went on building system after system and then pulling them down. It merely occupied my time, but at the heart my work remained vacant. I well remember when an old disciple of my father came and said to me, "What I see about me is like a wedding hall where nothing is wanting in preparation, only the bridegroom is absent." The mistake I made was in thinking that my own purpose was that bridegroom. But gradually my heart found its centre. It was not in the work, not in my wish, but in truth. I sat alone on the upper terrace of the Santiniketan house and gazed upon the tree tops of the *sal* avenue before me. I withdrew my heart from my own schemes and calculations, from my daily struggles, and held it up in silence before the peace and presence that permeated the sky; and gradually my heart was filled. I began to see the world around me through the eyes of my soul. The trees seemed to me like silent hymns rising from the mute heart of the earth, and the shouts and laughter of the boys mingling in the evening sky came before me like trees of living sounds rising up from the depth of human life. I found my message in the sunlight that touched my inner mind and felt a fulness in the sky that spoke to me in the word of our ancient rishi— कोहोवान्यात् कः प्राप्यात् यदेष आकाश आनन्दो न स्यात्—"Who could ever move and strive and live in this world if the sky were not filled with love?" Thus when I turned back from the struggle to achieve results, from the ambition of doing benefit to others, and came to my own innermost need, when I felt that living one's own life in truth is living the life of all the world, then the unquiet atmosphere of the outward struggle cleared up and the power of spontaneous creation found its way through the centre of all things. Even now whatever is



superficial and futile in the working of our institution is owing to distrust of the spirit, lurking in our mind, to the ineradicable consciousness of our self-importance, to the habit of looking for the cause of our failures outside us, and the endeavour to repair all looseness in our work by tightening the screws of organization. From my experience I know that where the eagerness to teach others is too strong, especially in the matter of spiritual life, the result becomes meagre and mixed with untruth. All the hypocrisy and self-delusion in our religious convictions and practices are the outcome of the goadings of over-zealous activities of mentorship. In our spiritual attainment gaining and giving are the same thing ; as in a lamp, to light itself is the same as to impart light to others. When a man makes it his profession to preach God to others, then he will raise the dust more than give direction to truth. Teaching of religion can never be imparted in the form of lessons, it is there where there is religion in living. Therefore the ideal of the forest colony of the seekers of God as the true school of spiritual life holds good even in this age. Religion is not a fractional thing that can be doled out in fixed weekly or daily measures as one among various subjects in the school syllabus. It is the truth of our complete being, the consciousness of our personal relationship with the infinite. It is the true centre of gravity of our life. This we can attain during our childhood by daily living in a place where the truth of the spiritual world is not obscured by a crowd of necessities assuming artificial importance ; where life is simple, surrounded by fulness of leisure, by ample space and pure air and profound peace of nature ; and where men live with a perfect faith in the eternal life before them.

I believe, as I suggested before, that children have their subconscious mind more active than their conscious intelligence. A vast quantity of the most important of our lessons has been taught to us through this. Experiences of countless generations have been instilled into our nature by its agency, not only without causing us any fatigue, but giving us joy. This subconscious faculty of knowledge is completely one with our life.



It is not like a lantern that can be lighted and trimmed from outside, but it is like the light that the glow-worm possesses by the exercise of its life process.

Being convinced of this, I have set all my resources to create an atmosphere of ideas in the *asram*. Songs are composed, not specially made to order for juvenile minds. They are songs that a poet writes for his own pleasure. In fact, most of my Gitanjali songs were written here. These, when fresh in their first bloom, are sung to the boys, and they come in crowds to learn them. They sing them in their leisure hours, sitting in groups, under the open sky on moonlight nights, in the shadows of the impending rain in July. All my latter day plays have been written here, and the boys have taken part in their performance. Lyrical dramas have been written for their season-festivals. They have ready access to the room where I read to the teachers any new things that I write in prose or in verse, whatever the subject may be. And this they utilize without the least pressure put upon them, feeling aggrieved when not invited.

Those who have witnessed these boys playing their part in dramatic performances have been struck with their wonderful power as actors. It is because they are never directly trained in the histrionic art. They instinctively enter into the spirit of the plays in which they take part, though these plays are no mere school-boy dramas. They require subtle understanding and sympathy. With all the anxiety and hypercritical sensitiveness of an author about the performance of his own play I have never been disappointed in my boys, and I have rarely allowed teachers to interfere with the boys' own representation of the characters. Very often they themselves write plays or improvise them and we are invited to their performance. They hold meetings of their literary clubs and they have at least three illustrated magazines conducted by three sections of the school, the most interesting of them being that of the infant section. A number of our boys have shown remarkable powers in drawing and painting, developed not through the orthodox method of

copying models, but by following their own bent and by the help of occasional visits from some artists to inspire the boys with their own work.

When I first started my school my boys had no evident love for music. The consequence is that at the beginning I did not employ a music teacher and did not force the boys to take music lessons. I merely created opportunities when those of us who had the gift could exercise their musical culture. It had the effect of unconsciously training the ears of the boys. And when gradually most of them showed a strong inclination and love for music I saw that they would be willing to subject themselves to formal teaching, and it was then that I secured a music teacher.

In our school the boys rise very early in the morning, sometimes before it is light. They attend to the drawing of water for their bath. They make up their beds. They do all those things that tend to cultivate the spirit of self-help.

I believe in the hour of meditation, and I set aside fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the evening for that purpose. I insist on this period of meditation, not, however, expecting the boys to be hypocrites and to make believe they are meditating. But I do insist that they remain quiet, that they exert the power of self-control, even though instead of contemplating on God, they may be watching the squirrels running up the trees.

Any description of such a school is necessarily inadequate. For the most important element of it is the atmosphere, and the fact that it is not a school which is imposed upon the boys by autocratic authorities. I always try to impress upon their minds that it is their own world, upon which their life ought fully and freely to react. In the school administration they have their place, and in the matter of punishment we mostly rely upon their own court of justice.

In conclusion I warn my readers not to get any false or exaggerated picture of this *asram*. When ideas are stated in a paper, they appear too simple and complete. But in reality their manifestation through the materials that are living and varied and ever changing is not so clear and



perfect. We have obstacles in human nature and in outer circumstances. Some of us have a feeble faith in boys' minds as living organisms, and some have the natural propensity of doing good by force. On the other hand, the boys have their different degrees of receptivity and there are a good number of inevitable failures. Delinquencies make their appearance unexpectedly, making us suspicious as to the efficacy of our own ideals. We pass through dark periods of doubt and reaction. But these conflicts and waverings belong to the true aspects of reality. Living ideals can never be set into a clockwork arrangement, giving accurate account of its every second. And those who have firm faith in their idea have to test its truth in discords and failures that are sure to come to tempt them from their path. I for my part believe in the principle of life, in the soul of man, more than in methods. I believe that the object of education is the freedom of mind which can only be achieved through the path of freedom—though freedom has its risk and responsibility as life itself has. I know it for certain, though most people seem to have forgotten it, that children are living beings—more living than grown-up people, who have built their shells of habit around them. Therefore it is absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love. It must be an *asram* where men have gathered for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature ; where life is not merely meditative, but fully awake in its activities, where boys' minds are not being perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the self-idolatry of the nation is the truest ideal for them to accept ; where they are bidden to realize man's world as God's Kingdom to whose citizenship they have to aspire ; where the sunrise and sunset and the silent glory of stars are not daily ignored ; where nature's festivities of flowers and fruit have their joyous recognition from man ; and where the young and the old, the teacher and the student, sit at the same table to partake of their daily food and the food of their eternal life.





## VISVA - BHARATI

ALL CIVILIZATIONS are creations. They do not merely offer us information about themselves, but give outer expression to some inner ideals which are creative. Therefore we judge each civilization, not by how much it has produced, but by what idea it expresses in its activities. When, in things which are a creation, the structure gets the better of the spirit, then it is condemned. When a civilization merely gives a large stock of facts about its own productions, its mechanical parts, its outward successes, then we know that there must be anarchy in its world of idea, that some living part is lacking, that it will be torn with conflicts and will not be able to hold together human society in the spirit of Truth.

In the ebb of the tide, the river bed becomes too evident, its mud and sand and debris stand out in prominence ; with the loss of its depth the current loses its strength. In the history of every civilization, there comes a period when the store of vitality, which it has accumulated in the distant ages, is exhausted at last. The manifestation of the creative delight, which is life's ultimate object, becomes smothered by the intricate overgrowth of appliances—the means thwarting the end itself.

Senility becomes apparent when the mind cannot create new ideas, or have the courage and faith to believe in its own ideal world ; when individuals merely repeat mechanical movements endlessly, and the habits of life become fixed. This is sure to happen when utility occupies the principal place in our endeavours. For life is not utilitarian in its spirit, its inmost desire being for truth and fulness of its own expression. Men have sometimes thought, in their career of prosperity, that the repetition of the methods whereby they achieved success, the multiplication of material, could go on for ever, until they were suddenly startled

by the warning touch of death.

The time has now come when humanity can only be saved by the awakening of a new faith. For this, the one thing that is needed, most of all, is to make a place in our education for some great idealism. The principle of material self-seeking, which pervades the atmosphere to-day, can never give us new life. It carries with it unchecked passion which, as it burns itself out, exhausts vitality and brings its own doom.

It is a fact of unique importance in the history of the world to-day that the human races have come together as they have never done before. In the olden days, the geographical barriers kept them apart. At that time of physical separation, each people, in its separate area, had to evolve a moral idea of its own. Only those groups of men, who had the mutual sympathy and trust which could lead to unity, developed great civilizations, because they alone were able to transform the external fact of their close neighbourhood into a spiritual truth. So were the peoples of the earth developed. Some survived, with marked characteristics of their own. Some perished owing to strife and conflict.

Now, in our own days, through the advance of modern science, the rapid transport of modern times has altered the past situation irrevocably. The physical barriers between man and man are overcome; only the barriers of habit remain. But men go on living as though the old limitations were still real. In place of the natural obstacles of the past, they put up their own artificial modes of exclusion—their armaments, their prohibitive tariffs, their passport regulations, their national politics and diplomacies. These new obstructions, being artificial, are a burden that crush the people under the weight of their dead material and create deformities in their moral nature.

The mentality of the world has to be changed in order to meet the new environment of the modern age. Otherwise we shall never attain that peace which is the infinite atmosphere of Truth.

But to accept this truth of our own age demands a new education. Just as, hitherto, the collective egoism of the Nation has been cultivated



in our schools, and has given rise to a nationalism which is vainglorious and exclusive, even so will it be necessary now to establish a new education on the basis, not of nationalism but of a wider relationship of humanity.

The aim of Visva-Bharati is to acknowledge the best ideal of the present age in the centre of her educational mission. The question therefore arises, what is the immediate step that she should take in order to fulfil her object. The first thing which must occupy our attention is to concentrate in this institution the different cultures of the East and West, especially those that have taken their birth in India, or found shelter in her house. India must fully know herself in order to make herself known to others.

Love hungers for perfect knowledge. The first step, therefore, must be to secure a true understanding of all the real wealth that has been produced and cherished by every section of those who compose the varied life of India. With the realization of the ancestral wealth of our own culture, comes our responsibility to offer to share it with the rest of the world.

We have educational establishments where we are brought up in the idea that we can only borrow, but not give. Have we absolutely settled down into this state of destitution? We must not say so. Our wealth is truly proved by our ability to give, and Visva-Bharati is to prove this on behalf of India. Our mission is to show that we also have a place in the heart of the great world; that we fully acknowledge our obligation of offering it our hospitality.

It has been said in our scriptures अतिथिदेवो भव, asking us to realize that the Divine comes to us as our guest, claiming our homage. All that is great and true in humanity is ever waiting at our gate to be invited. It is not for us to question it about the country to which it belongs, but to receive it in our home and bring before it the best that we have. We are told in Kalidasa's drama how Sakuntala, absorbed in her passionate love for Dushyanta, sat dreaming only of that which was

the immediate object of her desire. She allowed the Guest to go away, unwelcomed and unattended. Therefore the curse fell on her that "she should not realize her desire for the sake of which she neglected her duty". When she forgot to pay her attention to him who was for her representative of the large world of men, she lost her own little world of dreams.

Visva-Bharati is India's invitation to the world, her offer of sacrifice to the highest truth of man.

1923

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

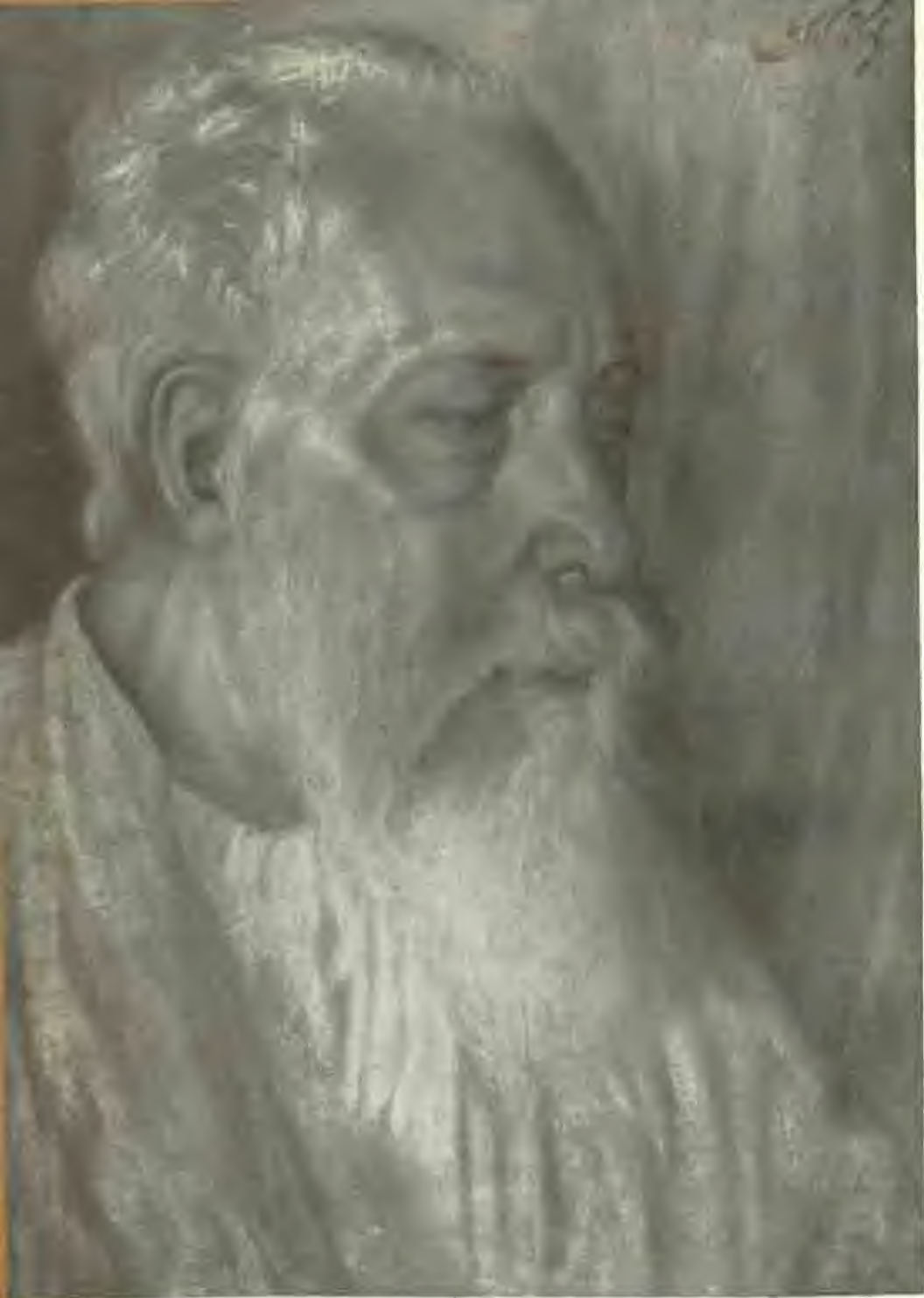
## PLATES



*Notes on the plates are  
at the end of the book.*



'Undulating, uninterrupted, unfurrowed by the ploughshare, spaces spread on all sides of this Santiniketan asram. Here and there bushes rise sparsely, consisting of stunted wild palms, wild blackberry trees, a prickly plant or two, and anthills. Through these lonely fields a red streak of a path goes winding towards the villages on the horizon; along this path wend villagers to the "hat" at Bolpur town—Santhal girls with haystacks to sell, and loaded bullock-carts whose moaning wheels leave a trail of dust in the silent sunlight of noonday. On the highest point of this leafless solitude, as can be seen from far, rises a row of tall, straight sal trees, through whose lacy foliage a traveller can glimpse the spire of an iron temple and a part of the roof of a two-storied building. Here, in a grove of mangoes and emolakes, amidst sal and mahuya trees, is our Santiniketan asram.'









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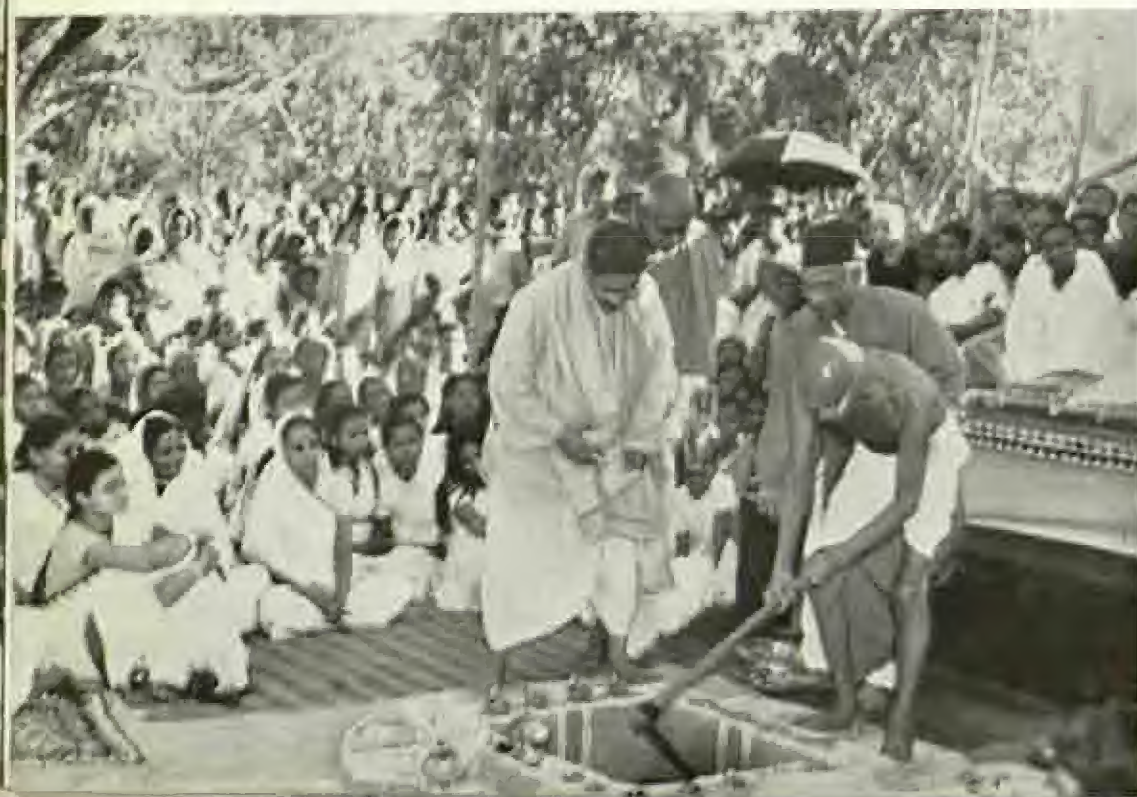




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I have built with mud a shelter for my last hours  
and have named it Syamali.

I have built it on that dust  
which buries in it all sufferings  
and cleanses all stains.



## SANTINIKETAN

THE GENESIS of the Visva-Bharati goes back to the beginning of the present century, to be precise, the year 1901 when Rabindranath Tagore sought to give institutional expression to his ideal of education by founding a modest school which earned the sobriquet, half critical, half complimentary, 'A Poet's School' in a secluded spot, two miles from Bolpur Station on the E. I. Railway loop-line. Though rather a desolate place to serve as the site of a school, it was already consecrated ground. For here had come some forty years ago another remarkable man, the Poet's father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, described by Lord Ronaldshay in his book *THE HEART OF ARYAVARTA* as "an austere figure, driven restlessly to and fro over the land by an absorbing quest—no less than that of God", and found awhile in its solitude the peace that passeth understanding and raised a temple of worship. The Maharshi also built a guest house and laid out an orchard, assigning to the establishment, which he named SANTINIKETAN (Abode of Peace), a generous slice of the income from his landed estates for the benefit of those who might care to stop here for a few days to meditate on the Infinite Being.

The 'Poet's School' was not a very flourishing institution financially and running it proved to be a heavy drain on the Poet's limited share in the income from his ancestral property. Nevertheless, he succeeded in gathering around him a devoted band of colleagues among whom were Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, a fiery nationalist and an ardent Roman Catholic who had adopted the dress and way of life of a Hindu *sannyasin*, Mohitchandra Sen, scholar and litterateur, and the young Satishchandra Ray, whose premature death blasted the promise of a brilliant literary career. Another young man of promise, drawn to the institution, was



Ajitkumar Chakravarty who also died young but not before he had established himself in the forefront of Bengalee critics mainly as an interpreter of the Poet's writings. It was men like these who helped the Poet to carry on his bold experiment against heavy odds and build up an institution the unique character of which struck even a casual visitor like the author of *THE HEART OF ARYAVARTA* as evidenced in the following extract:

"Here was a reproduction in miniature of the conditions amid which the civilization of India had been born, the life close to nature in the heart of the forest which provided the early Aryan settlers with all that they required. One recognised in all that one saw around one both a protest against the artificiality of modern life, and an offering of homage to the ideals and traditions of the past."

But that was certainly not all. For, years ago the Poet had realized that "in India, the history of humanity is seeking to elaborate a definite synthesis . . . On us to-day is thrown the responsibility of building up a greater India, in which Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians, the dark-skinned and the white-skinned will all find their place".

The Poet's ambition that his institution should be the instrument of such a synthesis was made clear in a letter written in 1913 during his European tour which brought him world-fame as the author of *GITANJALI*. "All our vagueness will disappear", he wrote, "if we can place our institution in the light of the whole world. If we confine our institution within the local limits of the time and space of our country, it will lose its purity."

The idea of establishing a centre of learning, where the whole world would meet in a comprehensive communion of culture, had thus been maturing in his mind for years. His travels in war-torn Europe, in 1920-21, confirmed this idea in a concrete shape as the immediate result of his contact with some of the noblest minds in Europe. Among them was Professor Sylvain Levi, a celebrated Indologist, whom he invited to come out to India and lecture to the students of Santiniketan. Another,



a young Englishman called L. K. Elmhirst, whom he met in America, offered to assist the Poet in realizing his cherished dream of integrating the academic activities of his institution with the economic and social life of the village communities around the settlement.

On his return to India, the Poet made himself busy with plans for the Visva-Bharati, a name which had been coined several years ago with two Sanskrit words VISVA, meaning the world in its universal aspect, and BHARATI, from the word BHARAT (India), meaning wisdom and culture as embodied in the true spirit of India. Visva-Bharati was to have as its motto the Sanskrit text यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम्, Where the whole world forms its own single nest.

The formal inauguration of the Visva-Bharati took place on December 22, 1921, at a meeting held at Santiniketan, appropriately enough on the day which marked the anniversary of the dedication of the Asram temple by his father thirty years ago. This historic occasion was presided over by Dr. Brajendranath Seal, modern India's foremost scholar and philosopher. The academic activities of this new institution started with the lectures of Professor Levi, the first of a succession of visiting professors of the Visva-Bharati, who were all eminent scholars with an international reputation such as Professors Winternitz and Lesny from Czechoslovakia, Sten Konow from Norway, Formici and Tucci from Italy, Germanus from Hungary.

Contact with foreigners was however no new experience for the inmates of Santiniketan who had already living in their midst Rev. C. F. Andrews and Mr. William Pearson, two Englishmen who had adopted India as their home and accepted the Poet as their Gurudev. Of these two "Willie" Pearson, as he was affectionately called at Santiniketan, had completely identified himself with the life and activities not only of the Asram itself but also of the surrounding villages—an intimate association severed by his premature death, in 1923, caused by an accident during a railway journey in Italy. Like Mr. Pearson Mr. Andrews had also made his home at Santiniketan where he participated in teaching



work for a time ; but later he was obliged to be absent from the Asram for long periods owing to the urgent calls of his varied self-imposed tasks in the cause of the country he had chosen to serve. But he remained loyal to the institution which he served as Vice-President till the last day of his life and whenever he could snatch himself away from his other work he would come to Santiniketan and place himself at the disposal of his Gurudev.

'Dinabandhu' Andrews, it is relevant to recall in this connexion, served as a link between the Poet and Mahatma Gandhi, whose long association with Santiniketan started when he made it his home for a time on his return to his mother country from his triumphant Satyagraha campaign in South Africa. It was a brief but fruitful period in the history of the Asram, for Mahatmaji never stayed in any place without making close human contacts, imparting a new quality to the life of the people he met. This happened also in the case of Santiniketan, the atmosphere of the entire Asram becoming enriched with the leaven of Gandhiji's unique character.

Among the inmates of the Asram with whom Gandhiji formed an enduring relationship as a result of his first visit to Santiniketan was Dwijendranath Tagore, the Poet's eldest brother, whom Gandhiji always referred to in reverent affection as 'Barodada', as the Poet himself did. The two were drawn to each other by an irresistible mutual attraction, for Dwijendranath was, like Gandhiji, a childlike soul, the influence of whose personality permeated the entire Asram. His unpretentious home in a grove of trees in a corner of the settlement resembled the forest retreat of an ancient Indian sage: here would gather an interested group of students and teachers to listen to Dwijendranath's profound exposition of ancient Indian and modern European metaphysics and to be entertained by the demonstration of his boyish hobbies and inventions.

To return to the story of the Visva-Bharati. Its formal inauguration made necessary the drafting of a constitution, and a tremendous amount of spade-work had to be done in this connexion. The Poet was



spared this drudgery which was willingly and enthusiastically shared between them by his nephew Surendranath Tagore, and Prasantachandra Mahalanabis, then Professor of Physics in the Presidency College, who has since earned high distinction as the pioneer of statistical research in India. The Poet's son, Rathindranath Tagore, and Prasantachandra Mahalanabis were appointed Karma-Sachivas (Secretaries) of the Visva-Bharati on its inauguration, and they plunged forthwith into the work of giving concrete shape to the Poet's dream of an International University. The constitution was registered in May 1922 and a trust-deed was also drawn up at about the same time.

The newly founded Visva-Bharati took over all the educational activities at Santiniketan which had grown appreciably in dimension as well as diversity since the little school was brought into existence at the beginning of the century. Several sections had already been formed round the nucleus of PATHA-BHAVANA, the name by which the original school came to be distinguished in the new system of nomenclature made necessary by a new order of things. These were: KALA-BHAVANA or School of Arts, with Nandalal Bose, a famous disciple of the famous master Abanindranath Tagore, as its head; VIDYA-BHAVANA or School of Higher Studies where research work was already being guided by two eminent Sanskrit scholars, Pandit Vidhusekhara Sastri and Pandit Kshitimohan Sen-Sastri; a makeshift college, SIKSHA-BHAVANA, and a small women's hostel, SRI-BHAVANA.

The music department, now known as SANGIT-BHAVANA, was then a part of KALA-BHAVANA and there were arrangements for the teaching of both classical music and the Poet's own songs, the former by Pandit Bhimrao Sastri and the latter by Dinendranath Tagore, a grand-nephew of the Poet, described by him as "the custodian of my songs". The Poet's school had already started growing out of its chrysalis stage and the inauguration of the Visva-Bharati provided the institution with ample scope for further expansion of its activities in new directions.

Good use has been made of this opportunity: the academic activities

of the Visva-Bharati comprise to-day, besides the departments named above, CHEENA-BHAVANA or Department of Sino-Indian Studies, HINDI-BHAVANA, and also departments of Islamic and Zoroastrian Studies, all maintained by ear-marked endowments.

Few visitors to Santiniketan fail to pay a visit to UTTARAYAN, the collective name for an interesting group of buildings, everyone of which the Poet used as his residence at some period or other of his life at Santiniketan. A portion of the main buildings in this group has now been marked off under the name RABINDRA-BHAVANA for housing the unique collection of the Poet's published works in their different editions in almost all the languages of the world, his paintings, manuscripts of his writings, and other material concerning his life and work consisting mainly of cuttings from magazines and newspapers of almost every country of the world.

The college (SIKSHA-BHAVANA) now provides regular courses of study in both science and arts subjects for students who wish to sit for the Intermediate and the Bachelor's Degree examinations.

VINAYA-BHAVANA, one of the newest adjuncts to the family of institutions under the Visva-Bharati, is the college of education training up students for the B.T. course of the Visva-Bharati. The course is for one year, and apart from the usual pedagogical subjects, provides for training in educational crafts, music and art. The idea is to train up a band of teachers imbued with the educational ideas of Rabindranath Tagore and fully equipped to deal with school education in all its aspects.

The library at Santiniketan is a rich treasure-house of comprehensive knowledge containing, as it does, books in almost all the languages of the world, a large number of which were received by the Poet as gifts from various countries, besides a unique collection of manuscripts in Sanskrit and Bengali. Now and then a reader in this library will come across a book with marginal notes written in the Poet's own hand, the subjects of these books revealing the wide range of his intellectual interests.



The Visva-Bharati has also a Publishing Department (GRANTHAN-VIBHAGA) of its own, mainly occupied with the printing and publishing of the Poet's works, and notations of his songs. It also compiles and edits such of his writings as have never before been collected in book-form, and lie buried in the pages of numerous periodicals. But this has not prevented this busy department from trying out, with pronounced success, the experiment of making available to the reading public books at a cheap price on a large variety of subjects of intellectual as well as practical interest. The idea was sponsored by the Poet himself who wrote the first books of both the VISVA-VIDYA (Universal Knowledge) and LOKASIKSHA (Peoples' Education) series, the current list of which now comprises nearly a hundred titles.

Even apart from the Poet's personal contribution, Visva-Bharati as an institution has made no mean contribution towards the spread of learning and culture in the country. VIDYA-BHAVANA has to its credit an impressive list of bulletins and monographs showing a high standard of research work. The Santiniketan School of Painting is famous the world over, and several of Nandalal Bose's students are in the front rank of modern Indian artists.

Santiniketan has also led the way in the revival of dancing all over the country, while setting new standards in stage-decor and dress-designs for the stage, thanks to the KALA-BHAVANA artists and the guidance received from the Poet himself and his talented daughter-in-law, Pratima Devi.

The influence of KALA-BHAVANA is also very much in evidence in the products of SILPA-BHAVANA (Hall of Industries) in Sriniketan (Abode of Beauty and Prosperity), a sister settlement, two miles away, where is also located the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, practically the creation of L. K. Elmhirst under the inspiration of the Poet. As mentioned earlier in this account, Mr. Elmhirst came out to India at the invitation of the Poet, soon after the foundation of the Visva-Bharati, and plunged forthwith into the work of building up a village welfare organiza-

tion at Sriniketan. He found an ardent colleague in the late Kalimohan Ghose who had an unrivalled knowledge of the Bengal village. Rathindranath Tagore, who had been associated with the work from the very beginning, took over charge when Mr. Elmhirst left after some years. Mr. Elmhirst however has never lost touch with Sriniketan to which he returns every few years to renew acquaintance with old colleagues and the work which he had himself started and financed to a considerable extent out of his own pocket.

Sriniketan, which is as much a part of the Visva-Bharati as Santiniketan itself, serves as the nerve-centre of a wide range of activities such as crafts and co-operatives, agriculture and adult education, anti-malaria work and the organization of boy scouts, carried on far and wide in the villages around Santiniketan and Sriniketan.

'The Poet's School' has indeed travelled a long way in half a century: to-day the Visva-Bharati is a very comprehensive organization, each department of which has developed into a full-fledged institution in its own right, with its own buildings, almost its own landscape, and above all its own proud tradition. Over a sizeable portion of the arid plain marked by only two trees in the shade of which the travel-weary Maharshi stopped for a mid-day halt and prayers, a wonderful community has grown up in a picturesque setting of pretty buildings framed in beautiful glades. It almost seems like a repetition of the Biblical miracle of the desert blossoming like a rose.

But it is no miracle that has happened here. Visva-Bharati is only the culmination of the historic process known as "the Indian renaissance" set in motion by the dynamic genius of Rammohan Roy in the beginning of the last century. The Poet's share in this magnificent heritage came almost as an heirloom, for his grandfather 'Prince' Dwarkanath Tagore was an ardent admirer and close friend of Rammohan who first conceived the idea of welding a common platform of worship out of the best in the religions of the East and the West. It was only natural that when the Poet's father founded the Santiniketan Asram he should prescribe for



the prayer-hall a form of worship in which there was no trace of sectarianism. The inscriptions on the tablets in the pillars of the gateways of the Asram bear testimony to the catholic spirit of the founder. It is this catholicity of outlook that has shaped Santiniketan in its chequered career of growth from small beginnings to its present world-wide stature.

*December 1951.*

HIRANKUMAR SANYAL





## PLATES

1. A few stunted trees and a dirt track emphasize the barrenness of the vast plain, a considerable portion of which is now covered by the picturesque buildings and shady avenues of Santiniketan.

2. MAHARSHI DEVENDRANATH TAGORE.

'An austere figure, driven restlessly to and fro over the land by an absorbing quest—no less than that of God', who found the peace that passeth understanding under the shade of a chhatim tree in the solitude of 'a desolate tract of land later to become famous as Santiniketan.

3. RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

In his REMINISCENCES the Poet has recorded the thrill he experienced when undertaking his first railway journey as a young boy in the company of his father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore. The destination was Santiniketan, then a nameless spot, two miles from Bolpur station on the E.I.R. loopline, where at the age of forty he founded his 'Poet's School' with the benedictions of his father.

4. The marble seat under the chhatim tree marks the spot where the travel-weary Maharshi stopped for mid-day rest and prayers, and decided to raise a temple of worship open to all, without distinction of caste or creed. The memorial stone bears the following inscription: 'He is the repose of my life, the joy of my mind and the peace of my soul.'
5. Typical landscape around Santiniketan.... 'a row of tall ancient palmyra trees, like the pillars of the ruined castle of giants . . .'
6. The retreat built by the Maharshi at Santiniketan for the use of everyone who wished to meditate on the One Supreme Being who is Santam, Sivam, Advaitam. The Poet is seen standing in the foreground.
7. 'To the Greater Glory of God.' The prayer-hall at Santiniketan, with the Poet sitting on the steps.

8. Formal inauguration in December 1921, presided over by Acharya Brajendranath Seal, modern India's foremost scholar and philosopher, of the Visva-Bharati, proclaimed by its founder as 'India's invitation to the World.'
9. The famous *sal*-avenue, immortalized by the Poet in many of his poems and songs.
10. A literary meeting organized by children, a regular feature of the school life at Santiniketan, where young aspirants to fame read stories and verses of their own composition, while some prefer to assume the role of the critic. The Poet used to be present as often as he was invited, and offered his criticism and guidance.
11. The Poet taking a class. Few professional teachers have taken teaching work so seriously as the Poet did. He not only devised new methods of imparting instruction to young pupils but also wrote several text-books which illustrate his method of teaching.
12. 'High Education'.
13. Work and Play. 'I consider it as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact, not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air, but as living trees.'
14. *Vaitalik* or the prayer-song before the day's work begins.
15. A school class in the open air under the shade of trees. 'In my school I had to provide for this great teacher, this bareness of furniture and material—not because it is poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world.'
16. A college class.
17. Sangita-Bhavana, the Santiniketan school of Music and Dancing. Santiniketan has led the way in the revival of dancing all over the country, while setting new standards in stage-decor and dress designs for the stage.
18. Kala-Bhavana, universally acknowledged as a principal centre of art-activity in India. Several of Nandalal Bose's students are in the front rank of modern Indian artists.



19. Nandalal Bose instructing a group of students.
- 20-24. Frescos by Nandalal Bose (20-22) and his pupils adorn the walls of many of the buildings at Santiniketan. 20. Asram scene on the library wall. 21. A scene from the Poet's drama Natir Puja, on the Cheena-Bhavana wall. 22. Hala-Karshan by the Poet at Sriniketan. 23 & 24. Frescos by Binodbehari Mukhopadhyaya.
25. A Santhal family, sculpture by Ram Kinkar.
26. Udayana, where the Poet lived for many years, now houses the Rabindra-Bhavana, the museum of the Poet's manuscripts, paintings, and works in all principal languages of the world.
27. The library is a rich treasure-house of books in almost all languages of the world, and possesses a unique collection of Bengali and Sanskrit *puthis*. On the first floor of this building is Vidya-Bhavana, which offers unique opportunities for research in many branches of Indian Culture and Philosophy.
28. Sri-Bhavana, hostel for women students, adjoins the common kitchen and dining hall. Women students by turn assist the paid staff in cooking and serving meals.
29. Dinantika, built in 1939 in memory of Dinendranath Tagore, whom the Poet described as 'the custodian of my songs', serves as the club-room for teachers.
30. During the recess between class hours.
31. A volley-ball game in progress.
32. Alpana, the age-old art of ceremonial design, is a pleasing feature of festive occasions at Santiniketan, where new designs are constantly being evolved, and old designs discovered.
33. On their way to class.
34. A scene from one of the Poet's dance-dramas, staged by students. A new technique has grown up at Santiniketan in which the elements of acting, singing and dancing have been subtly blended to form a composite creation.
35. Heralding the advent of Spring, one of the season-festivals observed at Santiniketan.

36. Hoisting the National Flag in the school campus on the Republic Day.
37. A scene from *Ananda Bazar*, an annual charity fair organized by students before they disperse for the holidays.
38. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru opening the Hindi-Bhavana, Hall for Hindi Studies (1939). Dinabandhu Andrews, who had laid the foundation stone of the Hindi-Bhavana, is seen sitting in the foreground.
39. The Poet reading his address at the opening ceremony of the Cheena-Bhavana (1937). 'This is indeed a great day for me, a day long looked for, when I should be able to redeem, on behalf of our people, an ancient pledge implicit in our past, the pledge to maintain the intercourse of culture and friendship between our people and the people of China, an intercourse whose foundations were laid eighteen hundred years back by our ancestors with infinite patience and sacrifice. . . .'
- 40-44. Vinaya-Bhavana, teachers' training college of the Visva-Bharati, proposes to lay special emphasis on the study of the Poet's educational thoughts and methods, and on training in crafts: specimens of students' work are seen here. (41, 42). 40. Common room and library. 43. Art class.
45. Sriniketan Anniversary: Sports of village people.
46. The opening of the exhibition to mark the anniversary of Sriniketan, Visva-Bharati's rural reconstruction centre, founded in 1922 with the object of 'bringing back life in its completeness into the villages, making them self-reliant and self-respectful.'
- 47-49. Silpa-Bhavana, crafts department at Sriniketan, offers training to people coming from near-by villages in weaving, furniture-making, leathercraft and pottery. 47. Dyeing section. 48. Carpentry department. 49. Weaving room.
- 50-52. Highlights of the Anniversary Fair: Business and Pleasure. 50. Trinkets change hands. 51. Fun of the Fair. 52. Students of Santiniketan and men and women from neighbouring villages being entertained by a performance of Yatra, a kind of folk-play which is a regular feature of the anniversary fair.
- 53 & 54. Demonstration of Santhal choreography and archery at the fair.



53. Santhal belles kneel to the rhythm of their dance. 54. Santhal braves kneel to demonstrate their skill with the bow and arrow.
55. Laying the foundation stone of PRAKTANI, home of former students at Santiniketan. Among the alumni present is Rathindranath Tagore of the first batch of students with whom the school was started in 1901.
56. Procession of old students to the Annual Re-union.
57. The Poet moves into Udican (1939), the house where he resided till his last illness. With him are C. F. Andrews and Ramananda Chatterjee, two of his most loyal and devoted friends.
58. The Poet takes a service at the Santiniketan *mandir*. For many long years weekly service by the Poet was an integral part of the life at Santiniketan. 'Religion . . . cannot be doled out in regulated measure, nor administered through the academic machinery of education. It must come immediate from the burning flame of spiritual life, in surroundings suitable for such life. The Asrama, the Forest University of ancient India, gave for our country the answer to the question as to how this Religion can be imparted.'
59. Reception to Mahatmaji at Santiniketan (1940), 'my second home' . . . 'this visit has brought me nearer to it than before.' 'Accept this institution under your protection', the Poet wrote to Gandhiji on the occasion of his last visit to the asrama during the life-time of the Poet, for 'Visva-Bharati is like a vessel which is carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure.' 'It carries God's protection,' replied Gandhiji, 'because it is the creation of an earnest soul'.
60. Gandhiji, during his last visit to Santiniketan (1945), laying the foundation of the hospital in memory of his friend C. F. Andrews. 'Nobody probably knew Charlie Andrews as well as I did. . . . Gurudev was Guru to him. When we met in South Africa, we simply met as brothers and remained as such to the end. There was no distance between us. . . . It was an unbreakable bond.'
61. Jawaharlal Nehru on a visit to the Poet at Santiniketan in 1939.
62. Inmates of Santiniketan celebrating the birthday of Gurudev. 'My

ambition was to become the playmate of the budding children, not amidst the brick and mortar of cities, but under the canopy of the blue sky, in these unconfined spaces open to sunrise and sunset . . . My joy and fulfilment lie in trying to make these children dance and sing and to rouse the spirit of delight in their hearts. . .'

63. SYAMALI, the favourite mud-house of the Poet.

The home of my last days I shall build of earth,  
and call it SYAMALI.

When it crumbles

it will be like a falling asleep

of earth in the lap of earth.

No broken pillars will be left

to raise high their plaints in strife with Earth,

nor cracked walls with ribs exposed

to harbour the ghosts of last days.'



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